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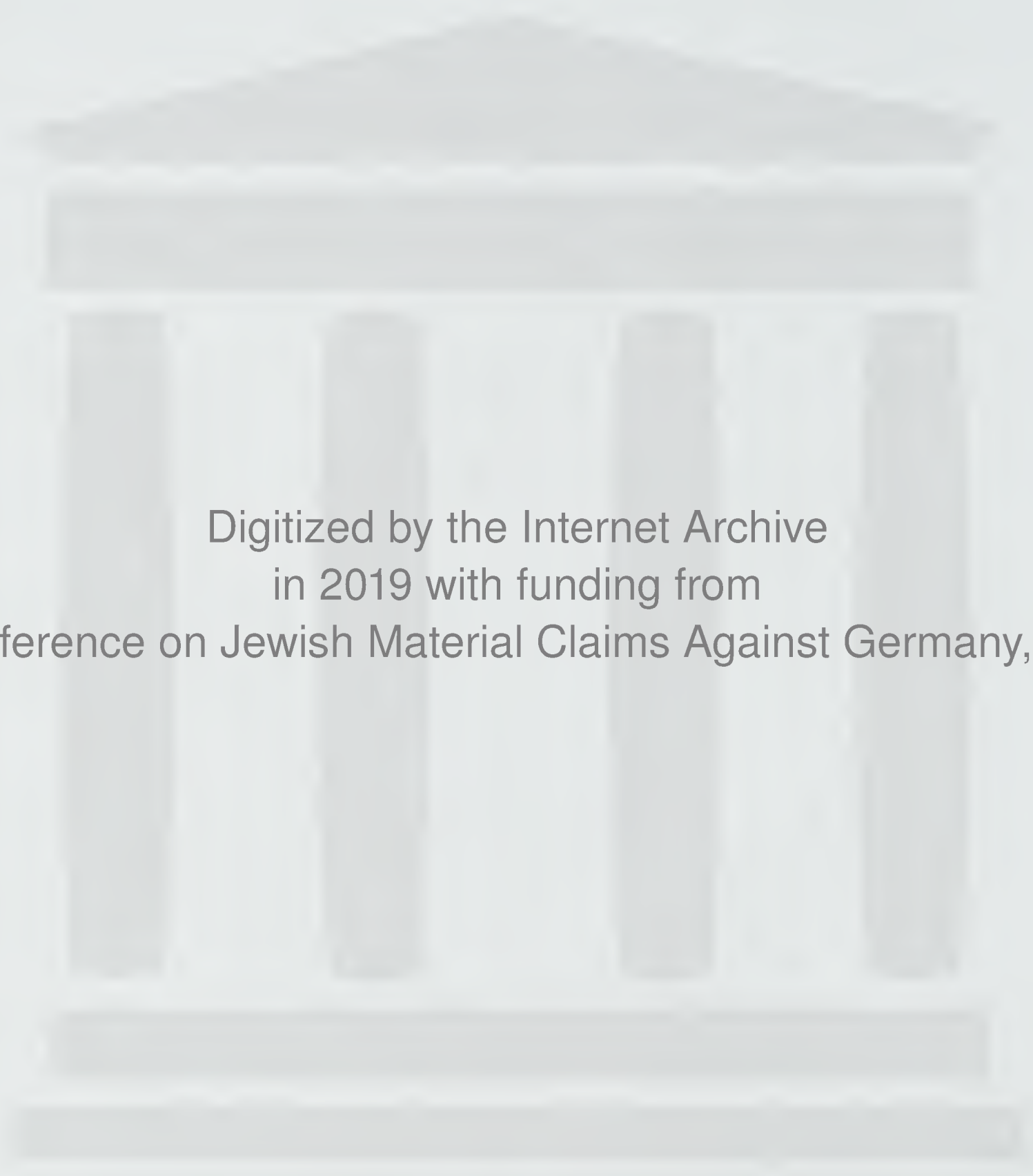


ועידת התביעות  
**Claims Conference**  
Conference on Jewish Material Claims  
Against Germany

## **Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection**

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## HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR SHARES HIS STORY

At this time of my life I decided to write about something that is so dear and close to my heart, namely my family who perished in the Holocaust. Knowing that nobody lives forever, I must at least attempt to describe them while they were alive and tell the whole world what happened to the European Jews, including my family. It is more than a half of century since I saw them alive and well, but I have never forgotten all those lovely faces, and the few precious years I was blessed to be a part of them. My family was a very close knit bunch, our love for each other had no limits and I will always remember them with great passion and admiration as long as I live. I will never forgive the Nazis for the sadistic killing of innocent six million people just because they happened to be born Jewish.

I was born on October 30, 1922, in Radom, Poland, into a middle class family. My parents were already blessed with five children-three sons and two daughters-ranging in age from eighteen to as young as two. My father, Isaac, had been seventeen and my mother, Sarah, sixteen when they were married. I was about five years of age when my mother sent me to a cheddar (Jewish private school) to learn how to read and write in Hebrew.

Several years later I started public elementary school, where I had a difficult time. My Polish schoolmates were vicious anti-Semites, and I often came home in bad shape, after being forced to fight for my life while the teachers looked on in silence. The school was open six days a week, every day except Sunday. My father, a religious person, would not allow me to violate Saturday - our day of rest-so I missed a lot of school. I had a hard time keeping up with the rest of my class.

My parents began feeling harassed and pressured by Polish right-wingers. During the Great Depression of 1929 a vicious campaign had been launched against Jewish business. The law required stores to close at 6 P.M., but in reality, policemen's watches were always set ahead, and the store would be forced to close early.





Eventually, the leaders of the boycott began to switch from hate leaflets to bodily force, and the situation worsened. The general population, fearing violence, avoided Jewish shops, including ours, and a lot of people began to use the situation as an opportunity to avoid paying their outstanding bills.

After a few years of increasing abuse and suffering, both morally and financially, my parents closed their store and moved to Lublin, where most of my mother's family had lived for many generations.

Lublin had a very rich history of Jewish cultural life because of the large world-famous Yeshiva (Jewish university) located there. Under the leadership of the great Rabbi Shapiro, young orthodox men studied to become Rabbis. We settled in a beautiful apartment overlooking a giant garden with old trees.

My oldest brother, Leon, had moved to the large industrial city of Lodz. He married a young lady, Frania Kaplan from the city of Radom, and was living happily, working as an independent real estate administrator. Life was good and in 1937 Leon invited us to visit him during our summer vacation. After traveling several hours by train, we were glad to see our brother waiting for us at the railroad station. Our vacation was wonderful and we visited many interesting places, met many of his friends and my parents were very pleased to see how successful he became.

During the war Leon and his wife, Frania were able to escape to Radom in order to stay with her family. In summer 1942, Leon was fatally shot while trying to escape from the Gestapo. And so a life of a young man with a great future came to an end at the age of thirty six. Even more sad is that at this time his wife was pregnant with their first child. He was another innocent victim of hate and insane deeds by the Nazis under the leadership of Adolph Hitler.

My second brother, Rubin, had begun studying chemical engineering at the University of Vilno in Poland, but due to the rising anti-Semitism there, he was forced to leave. He continued his studies at the University of Cannes in France.



While still in school he played on the college soccer team, performing well enough to be promised a well-paying position with a professional team. He injured his knee before graduation, however, and was unable to continue playing. He then tried to find employment in his field, but French law did not allow non-citizen to work without a special permit. He tried to work there temporarily, under tremendous pressure, but eventually decided to return home.

Actually, we were very happy to see him again, and it was easy to tell that he was also thrilled to be reunited with his family. This was just a few years before the Germans invasion, and because of our family's connections. Rubin was able to find a decent job in his profession. In a short time he married a young lady whose father was a very successful real estate business man.

In 1938, Rubin's wife gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, so gorgeous that they called her "Lala" (doll ). They lived within walking distance from us and we were able to see them quite often. After the war began we lived on the same street, Lubartowska, only a couple of blocks away from each other. A few months after the invasion of Poland by the German Nazi forces on September 01, 1939, Nina and Rubin had a baby boy named Kalmen after his maternal grandfather. With the beginning of the New Year of 1940 our situation was getting much worst.

Rubin was always ready to step in and help somebody in trouble regardless of his personal safety. I do write about him and his good deeds in memoirs so now will only add that he did save at least a dozen people from certain death, including his two younger brothers. After the war he stayed awhile in Poland hoping to be able to start a new life with his wife and a baby girl, but the unstable situation under the communist regime and their local helpers, did not guarantee a safe and happy life for a Jewish person. They finally received a permission to emigrate to Israel with only their few clothes, everything else like property, money, furniture had to be left behind.

My oldest sister, Hela, born in 1914 in Radam, Poland was already married with her husband Issac in a different part of the city. In the ghetto, they lived with us and on April 20, 1942 were taken together with the other family members to the death concentration camp, Majdanek, Poland. Like all the other victims of the Nazi regime they died a terrible death, just because they happened to be born Jewish. Writing about these atrocities I am hoping that this is





only a bad dream and on awakening we will be together again. It's hard to believe that a such educated, civilized nation located in the heart of Europe could have done all the killings, but the truth is we will never know the full extend of the genocide committed by the Nazis. Imagine, if the 6,000000 victim could talk, we would hear about more acts of cruelty, that we the survivors are not able to describe, without losing our sanity.

Now our family in the new apartment in Lublin consisted of our parents, my brother, David, four years older than me, and my sister, Henia, two years my senior. Our close ages made our relationship much more intimate.

My parents and I were quite happy with my new Jewish school, although it meant I had to work much harder in all subjects, especially French (which I had not taken before). The school was co-educational and closed on Saturday, but open on Sunday, which pleased my parents. I did not mind attending school on Sunday, but the Poles sought us out, throwing stones, using obscene language, and telling us to move to Palestine and leave their country to them.

Now I wish that all Jews, including my parents, would have taken these threats more seriously at that time. The anti-Semites became even more arrogant after Hitler became the leader of Germany, a nation which had been admired until then for its love of freedom, and high cultural and economical standard of living. Despite the difficulties with our unfriendly hosts, however, life seemed quite normal and good to me. I had a beautiful, close-knit loving family and my only worries were to do well in school.

The best part of my day was when I returned home from school at about three o'clock in the afternoon and smelled the delicious aroma of soup and meat being cooked in the kitchen by our mother, who was a great culinary expert.

That was when everybody in the household sat down to enjoy dinner, following by the blessing recited by my father. We used this time to discuss our school day, sharing our achievements and failures with the people who cared so much about our well-being. We were blessed to have a father who was willing to listen to our everyday problems and who usually came up with a great solution.



On weekends we would see a good movie, or read an interesting book. We did not have television, but we did have a very nice radio. Many times during the late night hours we listened to the broadcast from the United States. Quite often my father would play dominos and other games with me, most of the time letting me win to make me happy.

As the youngest child of the family I accompanied my father every Saturday to the neighborhood synagogue, which was located in one small room on the ground floor of an apartment building. The only window looked out on the backyard. The altar where the Holy Torah was kept faced the members who sat on wooden benches.

Most of the members were older men and a few young lads like me, brought by their fathers. Not wanting to stay cooped up inside, we young boys tried to sneak out where the Polish youngsters were playing. At first we didn't realize we were unwanted, but a few bad bumps and scratches convinced us otherwise, and we began to feel unsafe in our country, the birthplace of our ancestors. Newspapers were full of anti-ethnic propaganda and reports on what a "wonderful job Hitler was doing, handling German's minority problem.". This was several years before Hitler's invasion of Poland.

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On September 1, 1939, in the darkness of the night before sunrise, the invading German troops crossed the Polish borders. The Polish army did not even have enough time to call up the reserves. The German air force bombed the whole country day and night, turning cities into ruins with little resistance from the invisible Polish planes.

At the same time the Russian army crossed the eastern border of Poland, where they, too, found little resistance.

Lublin was very close to the eastern border, and it began to look like the Russians would occupy the city. After a few days of negotiations with the German command, however, the Russians announced they would withdraw and turn over the city to their partners in evil. We were given the choice of either staying behind in the occupied city, or of leaving with the Russians who





were retreating to a strategic point behind the river Bug. It was not a great distance by car, but a very long walk on foot.

My older brothers were very anxious to take advantage of that offer, but my parents would absolutely not agree, citing many mundane excuses not to leave home.

My father was certain that, somehow, we would make it through the war, remembering that his parents had survived World War I in the city of Radom while it had been occupied by the Russian army. True-there had been sporadic incidents of pogroms and vandalism at that time, but it was nothing like what was about to happen to us now. Even at the beginning of the invasion, the German Luftwaffe (air force) had a great time bombing the civilian population of defenseless cities and villages. They flew so low that we could see the planes clearly as they strafed us with machine guns. I was hit by shrapnel on my right index finger as I lay on the ground in an empty garden across the street from our house. The plane was flying so low I could see the pilot's face.

I must note, with a very heavy heart, that the anti-Semitic Polish hooligans made it much easier for the cruel German barbarians to achieve their horrible plans.

At the same time, there were also quite a few terrific Polish heroes who sacrificed their own, as well their family's lives, in order to hide a member of the Jewish faith. We will never forget these people, and we cherish them for their good deeds. Indeed, more of them might have helped, had they not been handicapped by their own neighbors, who usually did not hesitate to inform the Gestapo in order to collect a cash reward for turning in each person who helped a Jew, dead or alive.

The winter of 1939 was very cold. Jews were forbidden by the new law from entering all non-Jewish establishment. The Polish population received coupons for food, clothes, and heating supplies. Occasionally, I, or my siblings, tried to sneak into a distribution line with coupons purchased on the black market. Our own neighbors would then point us out to the German soldier guarding the line. Immediately he would run us off by hitting us with his weapon.

The Jewish stores had few supplies. We had to use ration coupons supplied by the Judenrat. The Judenrat was a committee of Jewish elders selected by the German authorities to





mediate Jewish affairs. They were responsible for fulfilling all the vicious orders which were being announced daily. The demands and pressure placed on the Judenrat soon became so intense that not many of the committee members survived long. The decent one-who were unable or unwilling to collaborate with the enemy-either committed suicide or were sent to the death camps.

It would be impossible for me to remember all the hated regulations which were listed daily in three languages, Polish, Yiddish, and German. Anyone who disobeyed these orders was killed by shooting, hanging, or received a one-way trip to the death camps.

Jews were not allowed to use any public transportation, courts, schools, parks, banks, stores, or any other places used by Poles. We had to turn in our radios, gold, jewelry, fur coats, and everything else of value.

Jewish properties were confiscated and put under German or Polish management. The real estate my mother inherited from her parents was confiscated and my parents were forced to pay rent for their own apartment.

After a few months, about the end of 1939, we became prisoners in our own homes. Men could not walk the streets without fear of being caught by the military police and sent to so-called "labor camps," which in reality turned out to be death camps.

The cold, snow, and ice were in full force. Because of the restrictions against Jewish males, my poor mother and sister were the only ones in the household who could venture outside. If they were lucky, they might bring back something for us to eat. They put themselves in great danger everytime they did so, by concealing the white- and-blue arm band marked with Jude (Jew). Any Jew stopped without the band risked a death sentence.

One evening two civilian Gestapo men entered our house, handed my father his coat, and took him away without a word of explanation. The next day we were told by the Judenrat that the Gestapo was rounding up all "rich" Jews, taking them to jail, and demanding an astronomical amount of gold for their release.

After a few days one of our tenants who was working in that jail put us in contact with our father, but the news was sad. Father, who refused to eat the non-kosher meals provided to



prisoners, was surviving on dry bread and water. After a terrible few weeks, a ransom was raised and given to the vicious Nazis, and my father was home again. But he was not the same proud, happy person he had once been. He had become very restrained, and kept his silence for days, being unwilling to talk about his experience.

As the days and months passed by, our situations grew worse. The German devils decided to completely segregate the Jews from their Polish neighbors. The whole Jewish population of Lublin was ordered to move into a ghetto located in a mostly poor Jewish section of the old city. We were given only few days to move. We were very unhappy to be squeezed into the ghetto, but the bandits threatened to shoot any Jews found outside the few streets designated as living quarters for us, so we had no choice.

Meanwhile, our Polish tenants were permitted to move into the apartments vacated by Jewish property owners. By that time our own big apartment was mostly empty, except for a few beds, a table, and a couple of chairs. Folks-Deutche (German residents of Poland before the war) admired our furniture so much that they had gone through our belongings, taking items without paying for them-or even asking our permission.

By the summer of 1940, the situation grew worse with a steady influx of people from nearby small towns and villages. Two or three families were forced to live together in one small run-down apartment in very unsanitary conditions. The days very hot, and at night we did not dare undress because we had to stay alert. German soldiers often knocked on ghetto doors in the middle of the night. Any men found inside were taken away to the labor camps. When we heard their shouting we immediately headed for special hiding spots we had built.

One morning we were not so lucky. The soldiers came in and found our brother Rubin still in bed. They ordered him to get up and dress, then stepped outside the door for a few minutes. My brother David, who had been working as a medical assistant for the Jewish Red Cross, had been given an official card protecting him from being taken away. He followed the soldiers out and took Rubin's place.





The Judenrat was notified of the situation and promised to try to help David. To our horror, we were told that his transport group was being sent to the death camp at Belz, from which there was no return. What a surprise, then, when our brother David returned home after a few long weeks of misery and horror in the camp. It was the first good thing that had happened to us since the Nazi invasion began. The Elders had kept their promise. David's release was secured on the basis of his medical experience in fighting the diseases which were now spreading to every household in the ghetto.

The winter of 1940 was upon us with its mighty power of snow and frigid cold, making our lives even more miserable.

Rubin finally found a job as an interpreter at a German warehouse which supplied household items to military offices, hospitals, and officers' homes. Rubin spoke German well and became very popular with the Polish co-workers, who acknowledged his importance in their daily contact with the oppressors. Even the Germans respected him, seeing how well he managed the unruly workers and easily solved many of their daily problems.

After a few months he succeeded in getting me a job there also. Now our whole family ate better food and more of it, since the two of us could obtain provisions (not always the legal way). Many times we risked terrible consequences if caught with such items.

One day, while we were walking home, I was stopped by a German military policeman directing traffic at a busy intersection. He asked where my armband was (which every Jew was required to wear on the left arm). I tried to find it, but to no avail. The policeman then told me that, as soon as he was relieved from duty, I would be taken to the Gestapo.

Rubin intervened and the policeman ordered him to leave or face his gun, but my brother was not willing to give up. He kept begging for my release until the soldier finally softened up and let me leave with my brother. This was only one instance of Rubin's many heroic deeds during the war.

The winter of 1941 was on the way, and promised to be just as brutal as the previous one. Our conditions were unbearable. The enemy continued to announce victories on the front daily.



My brother Rubin and I were still working for the same company, but in different branches and sections of the city.

Then, on December 7, 1941, my life changed forever. A Gestapo man, accompanied by an armed Ukrainian unit, arrived and wasted no time in rounding up all the Jews employed at my place.

Trucks were already waiting for us, and we were ordered on board. After a half hour ride, we found ourselves in the city suburbs, passing long stretches of empty land enclosed with barbed wire. Finally we reached a open gate, which closed behind us after we had entered .

We had come to “ Majdanek, “ the most notorious death camp of the Holocaust. It was equipped with the most modern tools of torture, enabling the German butchers to kill and dispose of many thousands of human beings over the course of the war. This equipment, we were to discover, was used twenty four hours a day, 365 days a year.

We were ordered off the trucks and “encouraged “ with Ukrainian rifle butts to form straight lines, arms stretched out, and hands placed on the shoulders of the person standing in front of us. The weather was frigid. The snow, combined with the extreme low temperature, froze my body so badly that I was totally numb.

We were still standing at attention and it was nearly dark, when another truck arrived. I saw Rubin and a few other people descend and join our group. After a while a Gestapo officer, accompanied by a giant dog, appeared and began a “ welcoming” speech .

He informed us “ From now on , this will be your home. Anybody trying to escape will be shot on the spot.”

I had noticed my neighbor moving his arm to the side and I tried to whisper a reminder that his hands should rest on the shoulders of the man in front of him. The German devil heard my whisper, but did not know who had spoken. He ordered the culprit to approach him and when nobody moved , he told us to point out the offender immediately. If we did not, we would be forced to stand at attention all night long- and in the morning every tenth inmate would be executed by a firing squad .





Everyone pointed at me, even before he finished speaking. I was ordered to step forward as he insulted me with all kinds of bigoted epithets. Then I felt the touch of his whip ripping through my skin; my eye glasses were flung to the ground, a mess of broken pieces. Afterward the guards pushed us into a nearby barrack furnished with long rows of wooden bunks in tiers up to the ceilings. Instead of a mattress or a pillow, each bed contained only thinly spread straw. There were no covers at all.

I can't describe the reunion with my brother. We hugged and shed a lot of tears, but when I learned that he could have avoided capture, my heart began pounding very hard. His Polish-co-workers workers had offered to hide him, but when he was told that my section had been rounded up first, he decided to lend me a helping hand in my time of crisis. The barrack was very cold and we had to cling close to each other in order not to freeze to death.

It was still dark outside when we were awakened by our Ukrainian guards, ordering us to send a few men to pick up our "breakfast." Their orders were accompanied by hitting and yelling. We had not eaten since lunchtime the day before and everybody was starved. Our long awaited meal finally arrived and consisted of watery coffee and a slice of stale black bread. We did not even have enough time to eat, but were told to "Machen schnell!" ( "hurry up!" ) and run outside. There we would be counted again to make sure that no one was missing from the night before.

After the count, we were broken up into several small work details for building more barracks. Only a few were completely finished, which housed us and a group of Polish political prisoners { designated by their red uniforms }. Our job was to dig into the icy ground and remove the earth where poles supporting the structure would be placed. We were given inferior shovels which kept breaking against the ice, but when the sun finally came out in full force, it became a little easier to unearth some of the spots.

A few days after our arrival we were marched out from the camp, guarded on all sides by Ukrainian soldiers armed to their teeth, and led by a few German officers swinging their whips with great efficiency. It took at least an hour to reach the First of May Street in the downtown area of the city, just across from a building Rubin owned.





We were pushed inside a communal bath house for poor people and ordered to undress and run to the showers. We had not been able to shower since arriving at the camp, so we were happy to oblige. We suspected nothing. We were temporarily delighted at being clean again. That feeling, unfortunately, did not last long. Coming out of the showers, we discovered that our civilian clothes had been removed and replaced with brand new bundles of clothes, laid out on long tables. Our new uniforms resembled clown costumes, with white and blue stripes, consisting of paper-thin pants and jacket, a hat, wooden shoes a couple of sizes too big, and no underwear.

We were so stunned by the sight, that we became numb, at first not feeling the punches our oppressors delivered to our naked bodies. Eventually, our skins torn and dripping with fresh hot blood, we came to our senses. This was not some stupid little dream which would disappear when we awoke! This was all very real. Everyone began grabbing anything he could put his hands on.

I wound up with clothes either too big for me, or too long. I looked at my dear brother, and began to understand how much he had sacrificed to be here with me. He was a man 6' tall, and everything was so short on him that he looked unreal. My heart began to ache for him. After all, I thought, this was all my fault. Rubin was in this situation because of me.

Outside a big unfriendly crowd had gathered to yell insults at us. Just a short while back these people had been our neighbors and friends.

We were shocked to see our sister Henia standing in front of the crowd, as white as a sheet of writing paper, and unable to show her sorrow. She was not wearing the Jewish armband, and we realized with a shock that she was posing as a gentile. She had long blond hair and was tall and very slim, so it had been quite easy for her. If she was caught in her deception, however, the punishment would be instant death-or a trip to one of the many concentration camps multiplying daily in neighboring countries.

Rubin and I did not exchange one single word on our march back to the camp, as we pondered the same uppermost in both our minds: How much longer would we be able to survive? Did our sister arrive home safely? Is the rest of the family still in the area? We would



have asked so many questions of Henia if we could have, but we kept quiet in order not to endanger her safety.

My brother waited until we were quite alone to entrust me with his biggest secret. Before entering the shower he had managed to hide his beautiful expensive watch in his mouth. This precious watch saved our lives later on.

Polish political prisoners became our supervisors, and wasted no time in assigning the biggest bullies as the leaders of our barracks. These capos had to have hearts like stones in order to function to the satisfaction of the Poles. They were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the barracks, as well as for the prisoners' activities. Even the smallest infraction was usually punished by shooting or hanging the culprit in front of all the prisoners, who were forced to witness the execution while standing at attention. Our original transport of over 400 men was cut in half in matter of weeks.

The largest and heaviest inmates were the first to succumb to hunger, hard work, and disease. They simply could not survive and function on our meager rations of dry bread and watery soup. Christmas and New Year were celebrated by drunken guards with extra shootings and beatings.

Our personal problems were multiplying daily. I was always hungry. My brother would save half of his nightly bread ration, and give it to me in the morning. While working I was forced by diarrhea to empty my stomach constantly. However, the trip to the latrine- really just a hole in the ground- was very dangerous. Trigger happy Lithuanian soldiers would permit someone to leave the area, but while the poor guy was walking away, he would be shot in the back by a smiling devil ! Seeing that, we felt forced to either wait until we returned to the barracks, or to relieve ourselves in our pants. We solved the problem by acquiring extra clothes in exchange for food. By wearing double pairs of pants, we could wash the soiled pair at the end of the day.

By the middle of January our original transport had been reduced to a few dozen survivors. A lot of the new barracks had been completed and occupied by Russian prisoners-of





-war. The new arrivals wasted no time in pointing out their Jewish comrades, who were taken away never to be seen again.

One morning I was assigned to a very hard job and had trouble keeping up with the rest of the group. The German officer noticed my difficulty and began constantly pulling me out for punishment. He started calling me “Josephine.” At each of our numerous encounters he ordered me to bend over, using his whip very efficiently.

I had a hard time making it back to the barracks, and had to lay all night on my stomach. I was in such great pain that I expressed a desire to end all my sufferings by touching the barbed wire loaded with high voltage which encircled the camp. Rubin, on hearing my wish to commit suicide, hit me in my face and forbade me to talk like that ever again. That was the first and only time that my brother, normally a loving person, gave me a hard blow to my face instead of his usual hugs and kisses.

Following this incident, Rubin decided to use his only remaining card, the gold watch. He found a capo who accepted a bribe to keep us out of hard labor and promised to give us easier work around the camp instead. He agreed quite willingly, saying that “it does not pay to fight to live a little while longer.” I will never forget his statement, that a German Gestapo man had assured him that all European Jews would eventually wind up in the death camps.

The worse times for us were the twice daily roll call of inmates. All the people who had died the night before would be spread out on the ground in full view. If the count was not correct we would have to stand at attention for long hours, sometimes at night, covered with falling white snow and chilled to the bone. Most of the time there was a mistake in the count, or the missing culprit would be found lying dead inside the barracks. Our chances of survival in the camp seemed to diminish by the hour.

By the middle of February, there were only a few people from our original transport still around. We all looked more like skeletons than human beings. Then at the end of the month, a miracle happened. Our names were called off by a German officer and we were taken away to a



waiting truck. After a long trip, which felt like eternity, we passed the gates of the labor camp at Lipova Street Number Seven.

After descending from the truck we were taken into a room, told to take a shower, and given back our own civilian clothes to wear! Still in a state of disbelief, we were handed over to two members of the Judenrat, who delivered us to our home in the ghetto. Our family's reaction was impossible to describe. Finally we found out what had happened that day we were taken away from our jobs to Majdanek.

On December 7, 1941, the United States came under a Japanese air attack, which was delivered without a formal declaration of war. The same day the United States declared war on the Axis nations, consisting of Germany, Japan and Italy. Henia told us that the rounding conducted by the Germans on that infamous day were in direct retaliation for the U.S. entry into the war.

Why were we suddenly released from that hellish camp? It turned out that the local Judenrat had a Gestapo man on the take, and for a large amount of gold he had been willing to get us out.

My father had been lucky enough to find a Polish business man willing to buy one of our confiscated properties from him. The Pole hoped that if the Nazi were defeated we would be able to turn over the property to him legally. They signed a secret agreement, for which my father received a large number of gold Russian coins. I do not know how much it was. We did not ask, nor were we told.

March 1, 1942, was Rublin's birthday, but the occasion was shadowed by our father's illness. He had spent the time of our absence praying and fasting. Now the change in him was unbelievable. We felt we must get him to a specialist, but Jewish doctors were forbidden to practice medicine-and Polish doctors were not allowed to treat Jewish patients.

Finally we found a doctor willing to take the chance for a large payoff. My father was diagnosed with stomach cancer, a condition which made him lose weight and all desire to eat.





Medicine was only obtainable on the black market for a fortune. Nothing could be done for him, we were told, just hope for a fast end to his terrible sufferings.

My father passed away a couple of weeks later. My dear mother, an angel now residing in heaven, was at his side, holding his hand until the bitter end. She told us that he knew quite well about approaching death. He seemed to cherish the thought of eternal peace, and his only worry was what would happen to the rest of us. He was only sixty years of age, but lucky to leave all his troubles behind.

It was only after we had lost our father to the dreaded disease in March, 1942, that we realized the depth of our love for him, and what a terrible void his passing would leave in the future. To this day, I only hope that I learned enough from him to be able to perform my parental duties as well as he did his.

The burial of our father was another dangerous ‘adventure.’ Although the new ghetto cemetery was not far from Rubin’s apartment, the trip was still dangerous. Even while walking behind a casket, there was always a chance of a funeral-goer being caught up in an ongoing “round-up.”

My mother, my two sisters, and my brothers Rubin and David all attended the funeral because they all had working cards. I was the only one forced to stay at home because I lacked working documents. Luckily, the trip went forward without incident. I can’t express my feelings of relief when my family returned and opened the door to our apartment. After the war we tried to find his final resting place but the cemetery was covered with grass and cows were being fed there. No sign of any cemetery or any graves. The Polish people didn’t let even the dead rest in peace.

A few days later a new order from the Gestapo was posted, in three languages. The notice stated that, because of the hostility of our Polish neighbors towards us, it had been decided, for our own safety, to let us occupy Polish homes in the suburbs of the city. The inhabitants of these homes would then move to the apartments in the city being vacated by the Jewish population. It was a sheer lie, and another bid for confiscation, but we had no other alternative.





but to obey. We had very little furniture left. We did still have a few good fur pieces and clothing which our mother left for safekeeping with a Polish woman who had always been very friendly to us.

Now we were facing yet another moving experience. Although our intuition warned us to be ready for more trouble, our hearts were hoping for a miracle. The clouds were already so dark. We had been punished more than enough, while the merciful God to whom my dear departed father had prayed so often was still failing to help.

We hired a man with a horse and wagon, loaded the few most necessary items, as well as ourselves, and began a journey filled with fear and very little hope. On arrival, we were assigned a small apartment with very little space for three families. By this time the 80,000 prewar Jewish population had been reduced to only several thousand. Our group consisted of my mother, sister Henia, brother David, brother Rubin with his wife and two children, and sister Hela with her husband. So far, our family was one of the few lucky ones which had remained intact, except for our beloved departed father.

April arrived and the beautiful aroma of the approaching Spring was in the air. Some of the more adventurous birds were coming back, spreading their colorful wings in the air. They flew in flocks, their cheerful chirping sounded as if they all were saying: "Don't give up, redemption of your people is coming."

How much I wished I could transform into a bird and fly off to better places! Reality prevailed, however, and my thoughts returned to our present situation.

We were living in an area called Majdanek Tatarski. It was separated from Majdanek, the concentration camp which was to be the last destination of Lublin's Jewry, by a few miles of thick forest. We, too, felt that the camp was going to be our final trip, but there was no way to know when. Each extra day might make a difference between death or survival.

Despite German efforts to keep us isolated from all news, we knew that the stories about transporting Jews to the freshly occupied Russian territories were lies. All transports were to the



death camps for a ‘final solution.’” The Nazis did a terrific job of isolating the Jews of each ghetto from contact with Jews in the other ones which existed all over Europe.

Then came the episode which changed my life forever. Nothing can ever erase the void caused by this tragic, unforgettable incident. After fifty-eight years it is still fresh in my memory. As much as I try, I cannot rid myself of the heavy burden of facing the reality that nothing in the world can reverse the cruelty inflicted on my family by Nazi Germany.

The guilt is overwhelming. One always speculates on what might have been, on what would have or could have happened if we had acted differently at that tragic moment. It might not have been a permanent solution, as you will see later, but at least we might have achieved a temporary victory in our fight for survival.

April 19, 1942 seemed like all the other days we had endured since the brutal Nazi invasion of Poland. It was a working day for most of the remnants of the Jewish population, who were still hoping for a miracle notwithstanding the terrible odds against them.

On this unforgettable evening we had consumed our meager dinner and my sister-in-law had put her two children to bed. The rest of us finally decided to put our worries on hold and get some rest as well. In the middle of the night, however, we were awakened from a sound sleep by the familiar shouts of the Ukrainians and the Germans:

“Alle fefluchte Juden raus!” (“All filthy Jews outside!”)

We had only seconds to grab our clothes and dress while hurrying out the door. Everything happened so fast that we did not have time to hide in the alcove of the room, as we had done successfully many times before. I am not sure if it would have made a difference on that tragic night, but that nagging feeling of “maybe” remains on my mind always.

Outside, the guards used their rifle butts and swung leather whips with great precision to herd everyone along with all speed. We were hurriedly assembled on a large, empty lot near the gate, with bright lights overhead. Then the dreaded “selection” process began.

There were two lines: one for people with working documents, and a second line for those not so fortunate. A stupid piece of paper decided in a moment the fate of the person. In





our family eight adults and two children, only my mother and my brothers Rubin and David had the life-saving forms.

My mother, thinking quickly, handed her valuable paper to me, knowing quite well what the consequences of her heroic deed would be. With her face showing no fear, her last words to me were: “ I have lived enough ... you are young and must survive....”

She then gave her jewelry to Rubin, knowing full well that it would be of no future use to her. As I was directed into the “right “ line, her face lit up, although she quickly covered her emotions, obviously not wanting to give me the opportunity to refuse her decision.

As the selection went on, she was the first of our family to walk away, followed by Rubin’s wife carrying her baby son, my sister Henia, carrying Rubin’s little daughter, and my sister Helen and her husband Isaac. The little group passed the gate and headed on foot toward Majdanek concentration camp.

My beloved mother, Sara, nee Szerman was born in Pulawy, Poland, in 1882 and after getting married at the age of 16 she moved to Radom with her husband who was born there and had the entire family residing for many generations. During the World War II , she was very active in protecting her family and getting enough food for us. The winter of 1940 was very cold and snow was coming down in great amounts forming icy condition. Men could not walk on the streets without being harassed or even worst, taken away for unknown destinations. So it came to that point that only women could risk to walk to the grocery store for the daily food rations. On one of these mornings my mother walked out very early while we were asleep, slipped on the ice and was brought back by the neighbors on a stretcher. It was almost impossible to find a doctor, because the Jewish physicians had their licenses revoke and Polish doctors were forbidden to help Jews. Finally we found one who agreed to come for a large honorarium. She suffered a broken leg, he put in a cast and for the next couple months my mother was not able to walk.

Now, the task of venture out fell on my sister Henia. She was born in Radom, Poland, in May 1920, graduated from a Polish high school in 1938 and the outbreak of the war a year later prevented her from attending college. Instead she had to move with us to the ghetto and worry



about our family's survival. She could easily try to live outside as a Polish person because of her non- Jewish profile and fluent knowledge of the polish language, but she would never agree to abandon her dear family. She also became the only person able to get some so desperately needed food after our mother's disability. Unfortunately, this cost her young life when in April 20, 1942 she was taken to the concentration camp Majdanek together with several other members of our family. The last time I saw her she was carrying my brother Rubin's two years old son. It wasn't even enough time to say a goodbye, hug her and place a brotherly kiss on her beautiful face. I miss her very much, she was only two years older than I, but always ready to listen to my mundane complains, try to advise and help settle my little problems.

Our mother was a wonderful person determined to keep us happy and well. She was full of life and love and dedicated with all her heart to her husband and her children . She was the only authority we turned to for advice or to whom we took our complaints while my father was busy during the day, trying to eke out a decent living. I was not fortunate enough to have her as a mother and good friend for very long, but her smiling face and her good deeds remain with me always. I still feel pain and remorse, knowing that she chose to sacrifice her own life to save mine.

We were devastated and cried for a long time afterwards, not yet realizing the full impact of this tragedy. Some men had followed the group at a distance, and were certain that the people selected did not even reach Majdanek, but were shot to death in the forest leading to the camp. For the next few hours we heard many shots being fired , but we did not know if they were being directed against stragglers unable to keep up, or against the entire group.

The Poles in the area would never talk about these incidents, insisting they are not aware of any killings. Their ignorance was impossible, however, because of the proximity of their homes to the ghetto. Many Poles, in fact, were construction workers at the camp during the day, returning to their nearby homes at night. From our confined area we could look through the barbed wire and see their single family homes with beautiful gardens, and a busy, functioning railroad.





Now it was just the three of us left. We had to give up our larger apartment for a much smaller one, to be shared with an older man and his adult daughter. The father was extremely proud of his experience in producing authentic- looking fake documents. I wished we had known him earlier. Maybe then we could have saved the rest of our family. We received one piece of good news. Our brother Leon and his wife Frania had escaped from the Lodz ghetto, and had managed to reunite with her family residing in the Radom ghetto. Summer came and passed, and fall set in, with much colder weather.

With the change of the seasons, rumors about the imminent final deportation from Majdanek Tatarski intensified. Polish policemen warned Jewish policemen that even they would not be spared this time, since the entire Jewish population would be removed, regardless of working status. No one was able to pinpoint the exact time of the deportation, but we had seen the Nazis bringing in extra military help. More Ukrainian guards were posted around the barbed wire perimeter, and only a few people at a time were allowed to leave the ghetto for outside jobs.

On the night of November 22, 1942 the rumors concerning transport became reality. The ground was covered with a beautiful blanket of pure white snow, as the enemy struck our helpless people once more. As before, they awoke us in the middle of the night, knowing that most people would be fast asleep and unable to react quickly.

The Ukrainians conducted their filthy job very efficiently, removing people from their homes, and “encouraging” the slow-moving crowd to run faster with guns, boots and fists. The drunken collaborators fired their weapons constantly, and confusion was great. David and I became separated from Rubin. Now we were on our own.

David had some friends, twin brothers who had made a good hiding place in their alcove. Having no other choice, we ran into their building and headed for the secret cover. The twins were already there, provisioned with bread, water, a blanket, and a couple of pillows.

We still did not know what happened to Rubin. Had he been able to hide someplace? Or had he wound up in that God forsaken Majdanek again? We hoped his luck had held, and no harm would come to him.





The night was over, and faint daylight filtered in to our hiding place. The sounds of weapons that begun with the “ roundup “ continued , and there was no way we could tell how long will last.

The day seemed to last forever as we discussed our next move. The brothers decided to take a chance and break out during the night. We knew it would be impossible to stay in that tiny place for very long. Our provisions were very meager, and we had to remain in a prone position most of the time. There was a great chance of being discovered and shot on the spot. We knew that the Ukrainians would stay around for a while, conducting house-to-house searches and looking for valuables, which usually were exchanged for alcohol and cigarettes with the assistance of the local population.

After nightfall the twins left, with our sincere prayers for their success. Following their departure we heard sporadic bursts of gunfire, and all we could do was hope that our friends made it in one piece. During the next day we agreed to try our luck as soon as it got dark, no matter what the outcome. If we were able to make it through the fences, our next objective would be to reach the house of a couple living past the railroad, because they had been quite friendly to us since we had been living in the ghetto.

We did not even dream about staying there any longer. But we took a couple of hours to get dressed in more appropriate clothing and eat a good meal. We went outside at nightfall. Surprisingly, it was very calm all around. The guards, after having consumed great amounts of 100 proof whiskey, were lying dead drunk on the ground.

We crawled on our stomachs close to the ground. The new white snow was mingled with streams of human blood. This was a horrible sight for us, since we did not know if our brother's blood might be here as well. I was convinced that under no circumstances would he allow our prosecutors the pleasure of catching him alive. We had spoken about that possibility many times before, and he always had given the same response. He would rather be dead than suffer a slow degrading death.



We found many breaks in the fence large enough to crawl through, and as soon as we were outside, we ran away from the ghetto as fast as possible, never looking back. In no time at all we reached our friends' house, and knocked on the door. They were surprised, but seemed genuinely glad to see us in one piece. They gave us the wonderful news that Rubin was still alive! He had stopped at their house after escaping with the young woman who had shared our last lodgings in the ghetto.

The man of the house worked for the railroad, so he had been able to supply Rubin with a set of clothes worn by railroad employees. Our brother was at that very moment looking for us in the various hiding places we had used many times in the past. As we were talking, one of the twins, who had successfully escaped just a few days earlier, showed up. After a lot of hugs and tears, he told us that he knew where Rubin was hiding in the city, and that he would deliver the good news to him right away.

Soon Rubin came in and a new round of hugs and kisses began. He kept touching us, as if to make sure that this was not just a dream. He admitted that, for the first time in his life, he was ready to accept defeat and head for the forest in order to join the growing number of active partisans.

After the overwhelming excitement passed, the nagging question of what was going to happen now came back in full force. We really were out of any more ideas, but to our great surprise the lady of the house told us her own plan.

This couple, who were gentiles, had two teenage daughters, ages fourteen and nineteen. The older daughter, unknown to Rubin, was in love with him! Although Rubin was a good-looking man in fine physical shape, he was thirty-three years of age, much older than the daughter. He was also Jewish, and being hunted by the Nazis because of his ethnic background.

The mother offered us a place to hide if Rubin would agree to marry her older offspring. This was a wonderful offer, and hard to refuse. But knowing Rubin, we knew what his answer would be. The woman was shocked when he said "No," but Rubin tactfully explained to her his reason. He was truly honored to be loved by a such pretty young lady, he said, but he still felt





bonded to his wife and his two young children. He was hoping for a miracle to happen, and that he would be reunited with his family once again.

Although the mother was satisfied with his explanations, at the same time she canceled her offer to give us a safety net. She had been prepared to take the colossal risk of being discovered and executed with us, just to see her child happy. Now that was no longer a possibility, she was unwilling to take the chance. A short time later we were back on the street, with no place to call our own.

It was the end of November, 1942, the weather was nippy with a lot of snow and ice on the ground. After a long walk we reached a large cellar which ran underground for miles in the old part of the city. Pipes were used to supply hot water to the numerous apartment in the large building above. Heat was generated in the old fashion way, by burning big blocks of wood in tall ovens located on the wall of each single apartment. The cellar was warm, though damp. To our surprise we found several dozen people hiding there already, spread out on the ground, and using newspapers and pieces of cloth as sheets and covers.

A few days after our arrival we had an unexpected visit which turned terrifying. A couple of Polish hooligans came into the cellar while we were asleep, and claimed to be police detectives. They ordered us to disrobe completely and hand our clothes and shoes over to them. Rubin realized that obeying their orders would be equal to committing suicide, and took a chance. He warned them about the sin of delivering defenseless civilians to a mutual enemy. He also tried to impress them with the names of the many important Poles he had known from before the war who were still active in running the social and industrial affairs of the city. His effort was rewarded with a partial compromise. They would leave us our clothes and shoes, but we would have to part with all our valuable possessions.

Rubin decided to take advantage of the heavy traveling period during the day to try to get to Warsaw. At the same time, David and I would try to join a group of Jewish prisoners of war and some civilians still working at a labor camp in the center of the city.



It seems strange now to say that we choose to walk into the lion's mouth voluntarily, but it was the only practical solution. We were playing a dangerous game, and praying for a miracle. Rubin hoped to get in touch with some of our relatives still leaving in the Warsaw ghetto, and at the same time to get the financial help we needed so badly.

He walked with us up to the gates of the labor camp, watched us joining a group of returning workers, and just stood there until we had entered the gates of hell. As we were about to enter our "safe haven" Rubin assured us that as soon he settled down in the new place, he would try to bring us over. I kept thinking that our mother's final sacrifice must and would triumph over the evil forces of Hitler's Germany.

At the end of May while we were marching to work outside the camp, a middle- aged man managed to get close enough to tell us that Rubin wanted us to try to escape as soon as possible. The man claimed to be our brother's tenant and told us to stop at his house after we had escaped.

We could not rest trying to plan the easiest and safest escape route. Feeling the need to share this pressure with somebody, we entrusted the news to a friend. This mistake almost sealed our fate forever. Our friend " spilled the beans " to anybody who cared to listen, and as a result, David and I were forbidden to line up for outside work at the same time.

Just when our situation seemed most hopeless, the unexpected happened. By chance, we found ourselves outside the camp, working side-by-side. We were near a wall separating us from the big beautiful Saski Park, which held so many pleasant memories from the past. We knew we probably wouldn't get an opportunity like this again, so our decision was made for us.

It was a hot muggy summer day. About midday the skies darkened, and began to rain. The downpour was so heavy that the Ukrainian guards deserted their posts to take cover inside the partly demolished building. Without any hesitation, David and I took advantage of the situation to escape, knowing quite well that another chance like this might never come again.

The wall leading to the park was quite tall and when we jumped over it, we landed in the muddy ground caused by the downpour. We had to run a long distance to reach the exit gate





leading to the main street of the city. When we finally reached the exit gate, and came out on the main street, we were faced with the difficult task of hiring a dorozka . {horse and wagon }.

We looked very bad, wet from top to bottom, and our shoes were covered with mud. We approached a driver and asked him to take us to our destination. After looking us over very closely, and getting the directions, he finally started to drive away. We took care to give him an address not too close to our real destination. After paying the fare we walked the remaining distance until we reached First May Street, no. 13A. Wacek Kusmirski, the man who agreed to take us in, lived on the second floor.

It was a very small apartment consisting of one bedroom, a tiny kitchen, and no bathroom facilities. A huge pot served as a toilet, and was taken out several times a day and emptied into a giant waste dump in the backyard. A large round barrel served as a community wash tub. Our main nourishment consisted of large amounts of boiled potatoes, served at least twice a day, and a slice of bread a few days old.

The family, husband and wife and four young children, was very poor. The oldest daughter was very pretty. Although she was in her early teens, she looked much older. While we were staying there, her deeds had a very profound impact on all our lives .

Kusmirski worked on and off as a maintenance man, but their financial situation began to improve, especially when Rubin began mailing checks and cash to us from Warsaw. Also, before the liquidation of the ghetto at Majdanek Tatarski we had filled up the shoulder pads of my brother David's new suit with Russian gold coins, and left it with the Kusmirski for safekeeping. When we inquired about David's suit we were told all sorts of different explanations: it had been confiscated by the Nazis; it had been stolen from the house by unknown parties; or they had been forced to use the money for their own purposes. In our present circumstances we had no choice but to make believe that we trusted them to tell the truth, or finding ourselves homeless.

Our days and nights were filled with real and false alarms about the movements of the Gestapo. German units were constantly searching individual homes and buildings for hidden Jews or underground resistance groups trying to sabotage the German occupation forces. The





punishment for this “crime “ was either death on the spot, or, even worse, torture at Gestapo headquarters while being interrogated , and then being shot by a firing squad. Many people began carrying poison to swallow as an easier way out of the living hell of torture.

Our host and their children slept in the bedroom facing the street, and David and I slept in a single bed in the kitchen by the sink, and overlooking the backyard. Many nights Kusmirski came home in the middle of night very drunk and cursing everybody, especially the “ F.....Jews “ in a loud voice. His wife would become frightened , quite rightly, fearing that while under the influence of alcohol he would announce our presence to their neighbors . Many of them were civilian informers who were paid in cash for “ illegal “ person delivered to the Gestapo, dead or alive, no questions asked.

Eventually, he would fall asleep, and then his wife would order us out of the house, stating, quite rightly, that the safety of her family took priority and sooner or later we would all be caught and shot. On those nights David and I would leave the house, but not the building, not daring to violate the night curfew. During the duration of the war only persons with valid permits issued by the military personal could use the streets at night.

On nights like this we had no choice but to use the cellar in front of the lobby, and in the morning Kusmirski would bring us back upstairs after begging his wife’s forgiveness. He would explain that this was just his strategy to confuse his neighbors and make them believe that he was an anti-Semite, as well as a good Christian and citizen.

Meanwhile, another dangerous episode took place. The teenage girl was a big flirt. One day, while looking out from the bedroom window facing the street, she smiled at several passing soldiers. She caught their attention, and they started walking up the stairs to visit her. She panicked and ran out off the house to the backyard, but David and I were stuck in the kitchen. The only hiding place was a large wooden closet. There were not too many clothes hanging inside so we were actually quite visible, especially our shoes.

The soldiers asked the mother about her daughter, and she told them that the girl had left the house. The soldiers didn’t believe her, and began searching the house, one in the bedroom ,



and the other one in the kitchen. He opened the doors of the closet and I have no doubt that he has seen us, because we saw him quite clearly. I do not know if at this moment our Almighty God in Heaven made him temporarily blind, or for some strange reason he did not want to see us. In any case, he did not raise the alarm, and we were spared.

After about nine months of such hell, being thrown out and taken back again, we decided to risk taking the train to Warsaw in order to reunite with Rubin. Kusmirski decided to travel with us, hoping to collect extra cash for our successful delivery. We were sure his presence on the train would be of no value to us, because we knew quite well that if we got in trouble he would not hesitate to walk out on us.

The winter of 1943 was coming to an end, but there were still a few more weeks of cold and snow before spring would appear. The bad weather was an advantage, since we were able to wear more clothes and reveal less of ourselves. The trip actually went quite well, except for a routine document check. Our fake documents were of excellent quality, and nobody paid much attention to us. We reached Warsaw and proceeded to the house where Rubin was staying, and were greeted with a lot of love and tears.

My brother was staying with a Polish woman, Wanda , who had visited us in Lublin. She was alone, had a beautiful apartment in the heart of the city, and was also very pleased to see us. Wanda was not assisting us for the money, since Rubin did not have much, and David and I came without a penny to our name. She liked Rubin a lot and was trying to help him save his two beloved younger brothers. Wanda was a very sensitive Christian, hoping to save a few human beings from the German devils.

The first night after falling asleep I had a beautiful dream. I was finally reunited with my family and we were hugging and kissing and enjoying the wonderful feeling of freedom. On awakening I realized that this was only a wishful dream. Our lives have taken a turn for the better, but we were still imprisoned in the house twenty -four hours a day. We still had to be careful with the neighbors. Every time the doorbell rang, we immediately rushed for our hiding place.





Rubin had a lot of news for us, some very good, some extremely sad. The good news: he had arranged a hiding place for some of our relatives living in the Radom ghetto. Our oldest brother's wife Frania was renting a room from a Polish family using false documents. She did not look Jewish and her command of Polish was flawless. At a different place she had her mother, sister, brother-in-law, and her sister-in-law( her brother's wife}, living with a poor family and paying a lot of money for that.

As usual, the good news had to be followed by the bad. Our brother Leon, after escaping the Lodz ghetto, had lived with his wife and her family in the Radom ghetto. In the latter part of the summer, the Gestapo had come for Leon's father-in-law, a prominent citizen. Finding Leon in front of the house, they decided to take him away instead. While being walked to the car under guard, Leon tried to flee and was fatally shot in the back.

He had chosen instant death over long torture and slow demise. If caught, I personally would have done the same in order not to give the Nazis a chance to see me suffer. His wife was at that time in the advanced stages of pregnancy, and after delivering a beautiful, healthy, baby girl, the infant was placed with the same couple whose home we had used after escaping from Majdanek Tatarski. Rubin had been involved in the arrangements, and it seemed to be a good solution. Rubin also told us about the intensive punishment the Warsaw ghetto had withstood, being subject to daily forced deportations to the death camps. To emphasize their hatred for anything Jewish, the Germans had timed the last deportation "action" in April, 1943, to take place at the beginning of Passover, the Jewish celebration of freedom after years of slavery in Egypt.

The beleaguered young men and women of the ghetto had put up a tremendous fight, despite the overwhelming forces of the German Empire. The resistance fighters possessed only old hand guns, home-made Molotov cocktails, and a small number of grenades, but they were ready to offer their very lives in order to show the deaf-and-blind world real Jewish heroism. As soon as the invaders crossed the gates, they were greeted with a hail of fire. The Nazis suffered



quite a few dead and wounded to their surprise, and retreated in a great hurry and in tremendous shock.

The defenders appealed to the world conscience at large for help, and begged their Polish brother partisans for guns and ammunition, but to no avail. Even worse, the ghetto defenders had purchased a lot of equipment from the Poles, only to discover much of it did not work properly. It was no surprise. As much as they hated the invaders, the Poles also had no great love for the Jews. These were the same people who, long before the war began, had boycotted Jewish businesses and welcomed anti-Jewish laws.

The Nazis had tanks, grenades, and planes. They bombed each building, which became infernos, in some cases forcing the defenders to jump from windows to their deaths below. This massacre went on for several weeks in full view of the festive Polish mob, which showed its approval by calling the poor victims “burning cockroaches.”

Now, a year after the burning of the Warsaw ghetto, we were still being exposed to the same dangers, as we had since the very beginning of the invasion of Poland by the Germans. Polish police and plain-clothes detectives searched the city for hidden Jews.

Wanda had become increasingly concerned about the possibility of a death penalty. The police were becoming steady “guests” in her apartment, which seemed have been exposed as a hiding place for Jews by the other tenants of the building. Beside us, she was also hiding Rubin’s friend, with whom she had become romantically involved. Wanda decided to abandon the present apartment, and find a smaller place for the two of them. Rubin had no choice but to start looking for a new smaller hiding place for the three of us.

In the meantime we had more sad news. Leon’s widow Frania had received word of the death of her infant baby girl, who she had left in the care of the Polish family in the city of Lublin. She was very upset about the loss, especially knowing that her slain husband, Leon, had wanted a baby so badly. Now after his tragic, untimely demise, his only child was also dead. We were never told how the baby died.





Rubin searched for a place to live, but to no avail. One day, while he was out walking the streets of Warsaw, he encountered a bunch of teenage Polish hooligans who kept calling him “Zyd” ( “Jude”, “ or “Jew”}, apparently trying to arouse the suspicion of passing Germans. Finally a German officer stopped, but instead of arresting Rubin. he ordered the hooligans to leave. When they refused to obey, he made them run by threatening the bunch with his revolver.

To gain Rubin’s confidence, the German offered to help find a new hiding place for his family. Rubin was to bring his family to meet him next day, at the same place. We never learned what his real intentions were, however, because Rubin was too frightened to keep the rendezvous. It might have been a trap to round up the whole family, or, just as easily, the man could have been a member of the Polish or Jewish underground. There many rumors of people posing as Germans in order to save hiding Jews, but no one knew if that was true, or just a foolish hope of the remaining survivors.

I refused to allow myself to think about God, because of the question which continued to haunt me:

“Why is He allowing this to happen to us?”

After all, hadn’t I learned in my earlier years, from both my parents and from my Jewish teachers, that God is the Father of every single being in the entire world, and He is the loving protector and healer of all His people?

“Why is He not helping us now, in the time of our greatest need?” I reflected. “What have we done to deserve such a terrible fate?”

Just when everything looked bleaker, our good luck held, and Frania found us a place to stay. I personally took some time to reflect on our situation and to thank our perished family members for watching over us.

In June, 1944, we were very much encouraged to hear that the Allied forces had invaded Normandy on the western coast of France. At the same time, the Russians were advancing toward our city of Warsaw. Even our Polish hosts, listening to the forbidden radio news, seemed to be more comfortable with us in their house.



In our present situations, however, every second counted. Each knock on the door might be fatal for us. Even the knowledge that the war was lost did not persuade the Nazis to give up their incessant pursuit of the Jews.

On July 23, 1944, we heard that Soviet troops were fighting the Germans in the streets of Lublin, Poland. After one day of fierce battle, the city was liberated and the German army was in retreat toward Warsaw.

We asked ourselves some difficult questions: Should we have waited another four months in Lublin, where we would now be free again? If we had, how would we have felt not knowing the fate of our beloved brother Rubin, as well as the other members of our family? What was going to happen to us now, as the Russian troops relentlessly pushed the retreating German army toward Warsaw?

On August 1, 1944, Polish resistance fighters rose up against the mighty German war machine - and we received the answers to most of our questions.

The underground right wing hated the German invaders, but they despised the Soviet Communists even more. The Nazis, taken by surprise, evacuated Warsaw. But at the same time, they also put up a containment ring around the city, effectively cutting us off from the rest of the country. We did our best to help the cause, fighting the fires spreading throughout the city. Although we still did not know what the next day might bring, we were happy just to know that our enemy was no longer roaming the streets of Warsaw.

One day, David was stopped on the street by a Pole who said he knew David was Jewish, and demanded proof. Other people in the group joined in this ultimatum to my shocked brother. Having no choice, David lowered his pants and exposed his penis. The anti-Semites then began a debate about what to do with the Jew they had caught.

Obviously enjoying their sick power game over such a defenseless person, they ordered David to run away. To make sure they would never run into him again, they threatened him with their guns, saying they would kill him as a member of the race Hitler had tried so justifiably to





eradicate from the planet. I am using more “refined” words now to describe this terrible incident, since I do not wish to repeat the despicable language employed by these hoodlums.

After that experience, we felt forced to stay close to home once again, and we tried to avoid any further contact with the so-called Polish defenders. By now, the city had begun to run out of basic food products, and the streets were mostly impassable, being blocked by collapsing buildings. After sixty-three days of resistance against daily bombardment and widespread hunger, the Polish leaders decided to surrender Warsaw, with its partly or completely destroyed buildings, to the Nazis.

The exodus of the Poles began on October 2, 1944, and lasted a number of days. Now that we had reached the day of reckoning, what were we to do? In order to leave the city, one had to pass a gate guarded by Polish and German police, a Gestapo unit, and civilian informers. The chances for a Jew to pass through successfully were almost nil.

We knew time was of the essence. We had to decide immediately on our next move. It seemed to us that we had only two choices: to try to pass through the gate out of the city with the other, or to hide again in the city indefinitely, this time in an underground bunker.

Our chance for survival without detection in either situation was very slim, but finally, we decided to stay behind. We dug on the bunker at night and, as people were being evacuated from their homes by the Nazis, we “liberated” the food, water, blankets, and pillows being left behind in the empty apartments. We also took warm clothing, flashlights, candles, first aid supplies and matches. Our bunker’s ceiling was very low, and we knew that we would have to spend our time inside in a sitting or prone position.

October 9, 1944, the deadline, arrived, and we had everything assembled, including a pair of handguns purchased from the departing Polish fighters. They were only too happy to get rid of the incriminating evidence, and to receive some cash in return.

It was snowing on the day we entered the bunker, and we knew that by morning our hiding place would be completely covered. We knew we would not be able to see daylight again





for an unforeseeable time. Our group included three women and four men: our sister-in-law Frania, her mother, her sister Andzia with her husband Andrzej, Rubin, David and I.

In a different part of the city, in a bunker similar to ours, Frania's sister-in-law, a cousin, and a couple of their close friends, were also getting ready to close the top cover, to hope, and to wait for a miracle from God.

That was our final decision. We would not know if it had been the right one until we came out alive. We had to stay completely silent, listening carefully to the slightest noise around the bunker. One loud word, sneeze, or cough could signal our location to our enemies. We had to sit or lie down until the day was over and the Poles and their German masters had gone from the section. At night we could talk quietly, put on a candle for a short while, or even make noises, which at other times would be out of question.

During the daytime we could see a few rays of light coming in through the tiny openings in the cover as well some melting snow. Right now no one would notice the cover under the snow. But what would happen when winter was over and snow melted?

According to our calculations we were just approaching the end of October, 1944, and we were already beginning to experience food shortages. Frania's mother was not well and needed special soft products. The real problem arrived when the water became stale and we could not drink it anymore. Even worse, despite chemical spraying and covering it with sand inside a hole at the end of the bunker, the accumulated human waste began to smell badly.

Rubin decided to take a chance and venture out at night in pursuit of food and water. He had not gone to all the trouble to save a dozen people from the Radom ghetto and find safe hiding for them, he said, just to watch them die from starvation or thirst.

One night, Rubin and Andrzej opened up the cover, "Don't worry about us," they said, as they climbed out of the bunker, and covered the entrance up again.

Time seemed to stand still while we waited for them to return. Finally, they came back loaded with many necessary products, including fresh water. Our feelings of relief were absolutely indescribable. We kissed and hugged them as well each other, and our self-esteem got



a tremendous lift. After that first successful try, we were able to venture out more often during the long winter nights. We used a broom covered with a soft piece of cloth to erase our footsteps, and the steady falling snow did an even better job.

At night, we listened to the sounds of artillery firing, an indication that the Russians could not be too far away. It was the sweetest, softest sounded music to our ears, a crying out to God for punishment and death to the Nazis. Christmas was nearing, and we could hear people standing near our bunker cover, discussing their plans for the holiday celebration in Polish and German.

One evening we had a very close call. A German standing near the bunker stepped on the cover. He began yelling something to the others, but we couldn't understand what he was saying. We drew our guns, ready to shoot it out with the Nazis and, hopefully, take a couple of them with us for the long final journey. Finally he stepped off the cover, cursing aloud. He slipped on the ice, and must have twisted his ankle, because he left right afterwards with no future incident.

Just around Christmas time, Frania's mother became much sicker and died in her sleep. The area was quite and deserted because of the holiday, so that night we ventured out. We dug her grave and bide our last goodbye to her before covering it, leaving a tiny marker to remember the spot. After the war, her body was exhumed and reburied at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. It was very sad to see the two sisters mourn their departed mother, but at least they were with her until the end, they knew her resting place, and she did not suffer a great deal.

This event triggered memories in me of our own wonderful mother, she who sacrificed her own life in order to save me from the Nazis' clutch. I thought of her in present sense, forcing myself into believing that no harm could not come to such a pious woman. God would not have let this happen, I reasoned, so we, her family, must continue to survive in order to rejoin her at the end of this senseless, cruel war. Could not allow myself to give credence to the idea of having lost her, as well my other family members, forever.

New Year's Day 1945 came and went, but our situation remained the same. Day after day, listening to the voices outside, we ourselves almost forgot how to talk. We kept our sad





thoughts mostly to ourselves, knowing that talking about our sorrow would not help us improve our serious problem.

In the middle of January 1945, the Polish workers and their German guards stopped coming to the area above our bunker, and we did not know the reason.

On January 17, 1945, after a few soundless days and nights had passed, we heard a loud commotion and shouting in Polish. Not sure what was happening, we got our guns ready-and waited. We hoped our good luck would last, one more time. The noises became louder and finally we could hear someone cleaning the accumulation of snow and ice off the cover in order to remove it.

What a wonderful surprise awaited us ! Instead of the dreaded Nazis we were expecting, we were suddenly face-to-face with our relatives from the other bunker ! Behind them we saw a number of military men, their faces radiating the most beautiful smiles we had ever seen. They spoke in Russian, encouraging us to come up out of the bunker. We could understand most of what they said, because of the similarity between our two languages.

Our reaction was impossible to describe. After existing underground for so many months, we were finally free, able to talk and cry aloud, and no longer having to hide our ethnic or religious status.

We scrambled out of the bunker as fast as possible. We had to close our eyes, blinded by the sunlight reflecting off the beautiful white snow, still drifting down from heaven.

Once we were able to face the strong daylight, the Russians showed us how to roll dark tobacco and a piece of newspaper into cigarettes. I will never forget my first long puff, and the black choking cloud of smoke which came out of my mouth ! But on day like this, nothing could spoil our happiness and the delicious feeling of complete unrestricted freedom.

When all the celebration came to an end, however, all our nagging questions came back in full force:

Had any of our family survived ? How soon would we be able to see them ? Were they waiting for us in Lublin, and worrying about our safety as we did for theirs ? Would we be able



to move back to our apartments, and would all the real estate confiscated by the Germans be returned to us, the rightful owners ? Was our ex-host Wacek and his family safe and well ? Would I be able to continue my college education ?

Other questions of a more philosophical nature haunted us:

What would living in a country with so many bitter and tragic memories do to us ? How would our ex-neighbors and friends react to our homecoming ? And did they by now realize who had been their real enemy ? Most importantly, would they have the decency and courage to admit the grave injustices which had been done to us by the majority of Poles ?

We ourselves would have to deal with the long-term consequences of our ordeal : Would we, in good conscience, be able to forgive and forget all the atrocities committed by the inhumane Nazis and their faithful collaborators in most of the European countries ? And finally, what kind of world political and economic system would emerge after such terrible destruction in most of Europe ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Our hope of a quick return to Lublin was rapidly extinguished. We would have to stay in Warsaw for some time, we were told. The problem was a shortage of transportation to the eastern part of Poland, compounded by numerous groups of Nazi soldiers roaming behind the advancing Russian lines. Because of these uncertainties, the routes leading to the East were declared “ off-limits, “ except for military personal.

Our first priority, in spite of our disappointment, was finding a place to live. Not only were most of the buildings in very bad shape, but a large number of Polish refugees had returned to their apartments in Warsaw, creating a great shortage of dwelling places. We also learned that most of the Jews, like us, who chosen to hide in the city after the surrender had survived. The Jews who had confronted the Nazis at the gate had perished in the death camps.

Living conditions were still very bad. Our group lived in one single room , sharing the kitchen and bathroom with several other people. We stood in long lines to receive a hot watery soup. We had to walk to an office in another part of the city to pick up coupons good for bread,





eggs, butter, and other items. Winter was still in full force, and we dressed as warmly as we could to prevent illness, since the buildings were not heated because of the unavailability of coal.

After a couple of tough months, beautiful spring arrived, and the warmer weather put us in a better mood. The Allied forces were doing well on all the fighting fronts, and the Russians were chasing the retreating Germans through all the occupied eastern countries- right back to Germany.

We knew that the war couldn't last much longer, but it was still too soon for us to claim a complete victory over the inhumane Nazis. Although part of Poland was already liberated, the retreating Germans were trying to delay the final outcome of the war by putting up a stiff resistance, despite their heavy losses.

Hitler had ordered his generals to fight to the last man, and that's exactly what they were doing, sending young, inexperienced teenagers to the front. The Japanese were also fighting a fierce losing battle, inflicting heavy losses on both sides. The end of this foolish war was so near, but still so far, for the civilian victims as well as for the fighting men. Each day meant thousands more dying at each of the different fronts. We looked forward to the day we could return to our city, but still the war dragged on.

In May, 1945, Hitler finally took the coward's way out and committed suicide, and Germany surrendered unconditionally. In June we received permission to travel by train to Lublin. After almost six years of living subhuman lives we were at last free to do what we wanted.

\* \* \* \* \*

The trains were jammed with travelers, and our trip home was quite an experience. As soon as we had arrived in Lublin, we were directed to a Jewish office which was registering survivors' names and reuniting families. At this point, we were able to find only two people we had known prior to the war: Mr. Korn, my high school Hebrew teacher, and Mr. Fruchtman, the son of a local fruit-store owner. Although there were several hundred Jewish people staying in the city, they were actually former residents of villages and farms around the city.





After arriving in Lublin, we went at once to our old apartment on Wyszynskiego No. 20. We knocked on the super's door and when he opened it, he went white as a sheet of paper and crossed himself ! He thought he was seeing ghosts, having assumed that the Nazis had killed us off long ago. Our old apartment had been taken, so we took up residence in another property belonging to our parents, a tiny apartment located at Dominikanska No. 3.

We had no money, and we had to decide quickly how to earn enough to buy food. David ran into a friend who had an established wholesale business, and he offered us his merchandise (clothes imported from neighboring countries ) on credit, which we could retail at the numerous open-air " flea' markets in the city. We found it difficult to become accustomed to this kind of work, especially with the unfriendly Poles as our competitors.

We also went to visit our mother's close Polish friend and neighbor, hoping to get back the clothes our mother had left with her for safekeeping before our move to Majdanek Tatarski. She would not let us in, telling us that our mother had picked up all our clothes earlier. When we tried to disagree with her, she threatened to call the police. Not trusting the Polish police, we left very quickly, and never tried to contact her again. Perhaps she received the right payment from God for her deeds.

Next we visited the Kusmirski family, with whom we had stayed for nine months. They expressed great surprise at seeing us alive, then began to make excuses for their obvious good fortune citing the father's business " luck. " To us, however, it looked more like the good luck of finding David's lost suit, loaded with Russian gold coins. We knew from past experience, however, that we could not succeed in obtaining justice from them, so we decided not to " rock the boat."

Shortly after our return, we made application to reverse the confiscation of our parents properties, and were initially encouraged when the court lifted the Nazis' law, declaring us the legal owners of the now-abandoned real estate.



The property did not stay in our possession for long. The leaders of the Polish Communists declared all private properties confiscated by the state and under government control. At least this time properties belonging to Poles also came under the same ruling !

Finally we were allowed to move back to our old apartment, but now we had to pay rent just like everybody else. Time moved on, and none of our dear family members had yet returned. After a while, the Russians began allowing the return of Polish Jews who had survived the by escaping to Russia before the Germans occupied Poland.

These were mostly young people who had not trusted the Nazis. After the famous German-Russian “ friendship pact “ had divided Poland into two parts, they had moved out of the area with the retreating Russians.

In June, 1941, when the Germans had began their cowardly invasion of Russia, the Russian government had deported forcibly all “ stateless “ ( i.e., non-citizen ) residents, including Jews, to Siberia. They took this step claiming “ security ” reasons, not being willing to trust the loyalty of the war refugees. This seemingly heartless move actually saved a lot of Jewish lives, since they were placed beyond the reach of the Nazis.

In the late months of 1945, we were pleasantly surprised by a visit from Zygmunt and Guta Winder. Our mother and Zyg’s mother were sisters, she being the oldest of the siblings and my mother the youngest. Rubin had know them because he was of a similar age, but David and I did not know them at all. In September, 1939, just a short time before the Nazis had occupied their hometown of Warsaw, the couple had escaped to Russia.

In June, 1941, the Nazis invaded Russia, and Zyg and Guta were deported to Siberia along with other war refugees. Siberia was frigid and had mountains of snow and ice. They were put to hard labor, cutting down trees in the Siberian forests. After both of them worked what seemed an endless time, Zyg was transferred to a bakery job, and their situation did improve. He worked in warm place, and they had plenty of bread to eat, and even had some left over to exchange for other commodities. We were very happy to have them around, and personally I considered Zyg to be like another brother of mine.





Meanwhile, the United States initiated the Marshall Plan to help rebuild Germany, and the Russians began shipping out everything they could to their own homeland, which had been devastated while they were fighting off the Nazi invaders.

Our own little family circle began to break up. Rubin and Frania had married immediately after our liberation. Now she was pregnant, and they needed their own place to live. They decided to move back to the same apartment in Lodz where she had lived with Leon before the war. The apartment, at Legionow St., No. 61, was in a building which they had owned partly. Miraculously, everything was still there, just as they left it, including the furniture! Rubin hoped to get a job as a chemist in Lodz, which was much larger than Lublin and the country's leading center of heavy industry. Frania's sister and brother-in-law also decided to join them in the new adventure.

Zyg and Guta decided to move to Wroclaw. It had been a German town before the war. Now the Russians had given it to Poland in compensation for the eastern part of the country, which had been annexed by the Communists. Wroclaw had a large ethnic mix, which made it easier to escape the feeling of hatred experienced by Jews in the "pure Polish cities."

It was the end of 1945. After six years of Nazi occupation, the country's mail and travel systems were still in disarray, and some people were still finding family members long presumed dead. For us, however, it looked as though our good luck had finally come to an end. Our cousins invited us to leave with them, but David and I were not quite ready to give up hope. We still refused to admit our defeat aloud, praying for one last miracle.

At the same time, we had come to the conclusion that this was not, and could never be, our homeland as it had been before the war. We were working very hard just to eke out a meager living, while our ex-host Wacek was enjoying the good life with our money, often spending his leisure time in our apartment.

Meanwhile we were getting letters from our cousins, who now proposed the idea of leaving Poland for Germany, where American, British and Canadian organizations were helping refugees by registering homeless persons for emigration to their respective countries. We



continued to ask ourselves the burning question : should we stay in the country where we were born, where we knew the language, where we had attended school, and where our family had owned property? Or should we seek better lives and fortune elsewhere ?

In June, 1946, something finally happened in the city of Kielce, located between Lublin and Radom, which made up our minds for us. There Jewish survivors of the concentration camps and their families requested that confiscated properties be returned to rightful owners from the Poles who had replaced them. When the Nazi victims received a negative response, they took their claims to court.

The Poles, fearing a legal defeat, attacked the Jewish families at night, killing all of them in cold blood. Forty-nine Jewish men, women, and children were murdered in that vicious attack. How ironic that these people had escaped the Nazis only to die at the hands of their neighbors. The Polish Communist press blamed the killings on the underground partisans, who were against the government as well as the surviving Jewish Holocaust victims. After that brutal act of hatred, we had no more doubt what we should do next.

We knew from past experience not to discuss our plans with anyone else. We had to make our move just as soon as possible, without raising our neighbors' suspicion .

It was a great temptation to talk about it to Wacek, and to a couple of other "friendly " souls, but the stakes were too high to risk making even a tiny mistake. Our lives seemed to have little or no value here. The Poles had gotten accustomed to seeing Jewish blood spilled on the pavements of their cities. Most were not ashamed to show their satisfaction and great hatred quite openly.

Jews had a presence in Poland for more than one thousand years. Now, they seemed to be saying, their country was finally Juden Rein ( free of Jews ). Hitler and his henchmen had done their job well. He would have been very proud, if he could see the Poles finish what the Germans had not be able to accomplish completely.

It was no wonder we were called " Wandering Jews." That's what we had become in 1939, when the war began, and now we really did not have a place to call our own. For many





thousands of years we had been persecuted in every country of the world. We were envied and vilified for having so many smart, outstanding people representing us in politics, education, science, business, etc. The jealousy and hatred we endured was strong and depressing.

Still I must make clear that some of the Poles were very honest and friendly. But they were a very tiny minority, and most of them were too afraid to speak out or stand up for what was right.

In Lublin I had become acquainted with a very nice young Jewish woman. We became very close, but I could not dream of getting involved with her seriously, while my future was still so extremely bleak. I had no desire to raise a new generation of children in a place where Jews were hated so much, and where I was surrounded by so many painful reminders of our gruesome past.

It was very hard for me to say good-bye to Lublin, the city where I had spent so many wonderful years with my dear family. While staying in our old apartment, I could almost fool myself into visualizing each of them, walking in the rooms. At night, while asleep, I could hear their sweet voices of assurance, saying that “ everything was going to be all right “.

There were so many questions I wanted to ask my father: Why had his prayers to the Almighty God not reached the high heavens ? What had happened to God’s promise to take care of his chosen people ? Why did we have to pay such an extremely high price for being Jewish ? Is it a crime to believe in one God ? Or to be the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ?

I personally had seen old pious Jews being dragged to their death, reciting their final prayer of Sh’ma Israel ( Listen Israel ), and the anthem Ani Maamin ( I Believe ).

Every person had been affected differently by the Nazi atrocities. A lot of people became very religious, thanking God for letting them survive to tell the world what happened to the Jewish nation.

I myself could not and would not pray to a God who watched in silence the murder of millions of innocent Jews and Gentiles. For almost fifty years, my anger with God was so intense that I could not go inside a synagogue and offer a prayer. I tried to engage many learned Rabbis





in a conversation on this subject, but to no avail. They kept silent or let me know that there was no answer to my question: Why did God not intervene on behalf of his faithful flock ? During the last ten years I have mellowed and have joined a neighborhood conservative synagogue, but every time we say the prayer for the departed, the same question hangs on my lips again : Why ?

\* \* \* \* \*

Finally, in July, 1946, David and I were ready for our trip to Wroclaw, Poland, hoping for the best. We had told our cousins of our plans, and they were happy to hear the good news. We also tried to convince Rubin and Frania to come along, but they were not willing to expose Sylvia, their beautiful four- month old baby girl, to a hard life of wandering , not knowing where the next night would be spent.

We left in the middle of the night while everyone was asleep. Since it was hot, we could not wear too much, and carried only the most useful personal affects. We proceeded with all caution and haste to the train station.

Finally, after a long train ride, we stood at the door of our cousins' apartment in Wroclaw. They were happy to see us, and after a good night's rest, they outlined their traveling plans. We would try to cross the Polish-German border by train to West Germany. There we would try to get into a refugee camp where American, Canadian, and British authorities were registering people for emigration. Zyg and Guta were anxious to reunite with another cousin in New York.

After a few days of rest, and prompted by the hope of finally reaching a freedom loving country willing to accept us as even partners, we were ready to move on again. We had heard so much about these faraway places before the war, but to us it had always seemed like an impossible dream. Many stories had been circulated, about how easy it was to become rich and famous there. We packed our belongings carefully, hoping to be able to handle ourselves in any kind of situation.

I thought we were experienced enough to handle anything, but the very next incident proved me wrong. We purchased tickets for the trip, but the train had no passenger seats. To our horror, it resembled the freight cars used by the Nazis to transport their victims to the camps !



The only difference was that these cars were wide open - and there were no armed soldiers accompanying us. As anxious as we were to leave Poland as soon as possible, we tried to make the best of it.

The biggest surprise was yet to come. We settled on the floor, which was thinly covered with straw, and happily looked forward to getting far away from the reach of the hated Poles. When we reached the border, however, the Polish border police showed up and began to confiscate our luggage. When we tried to argue with them they told that they didn't mind getting rid of us, but we would not be allowed to take anything out of their country. Their final words still ring in my ears:

“ The Germans took your lives and your property. We are happy to see you leaving, but your property belongs to our state.”

They grabbed our luggage, knowing that many people would try to hide their valuables. We had not, but some people had, and lost everything. The confusion, amidst the crying of women and children, was indescribable. It was difficult for us to believe that a whole year after the end of the war, the Jews were still the “ scapegoats .” When and how would this come to an end ? We wondered, and when would we be treated like human beings again ? The Poles had learned all the evil tricks from the Nazis very well indeed, and now they were using them against us.

We arrived at Stuttgart, Germany, with only whatever we had on our backs. It wasn't much, given the warm summer weather, and the fact that most of our heavier clothing had been confiscated by the masters of the “ New Democratic Poland . “

We contacted the Jewish relief organization and discovered that the few streets which had been set aside for Jews waiting to emigrate were already overcrowded . David and I were given a requisition slip for one room in a very old apartment occupied by an old German couple.

Their son , an SS man in one of the German death units, had been killed on the Russian front. SS and Gestapo units had been in charge of Jewish “ affairs, “ deciding the fate of Jews in all the occupied countries. During the war they had supervised the ghettos, the labor camps





and the death camps. Like all the other Germans, however, the old couple insisted that their son was an “ angel , “ a hero who had died defending his beloved German Reich and it’s wonderful Fuhrer, Adolph Hitler. We soon got accustomed to such claims of German innocence .

I had hoped to resume my college education, but financial problems came along, and once again we were forced to eke out a living. The “start-up “ was very difficult, but, later on, David became part owner of a leather business, and our financial conditions improved a lot.

Despite that, we could not wait for the moment of our complete redemption. After all, we were still in the company of the people who had killed our loved ones without showing any mercy. We could not and should not stay one moment longer than necessary in a country which had treated our people so brutally, and who still claimed ignorance of the past atrocities.

All the ” sweet talk “ about so-called German “ innocence “ could not make us change our feelings toward their country or its people. Nothing in the world could bring back our beloved family, as well as the millions of other innocent Jewish victims.

When the wonderful news came, we were delighted to leave Europe forever. For us, it was and will always be, one great unmarked cemetery, containing six million unknown victims. Even to this day, I haven’t been able to make the trip back to my native land to claim our rightful properties. My brain tells me I should go, but my heart starts pounding, just thinking about all the terrible atrocities I experienced in that old country of my birth.

\* \* \* \* \*

I lived in Germany, the country that had tried so hard to annihilate us, for three years. Finally, in late August, 1949, I received the long-awaited permission to sail to the land of the free. My cousins and my brother David and his wife Giza had left a few months ahead of me. I boarded a military ship “General Hanh “ for my trip, and ten long days later I saw the famous “ Statue of Liberty “ with her arms stretched out, ready to give me that motherly hug I had missed so badly since the Nazis had taken away my own beloved mother. I will never forget that moment as long as I live.



I spent a few days in New York, then boarded a train to Providence, where my brother David and his wife had been living since their arrival in the United States. They were expecting their first child and I could see the excitement in their eyes while waiting for this new generation to be born.

On November 21, 1949, Giza gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. She was given the name Eleanor, in memory of Giza's mother who died in a German concentration camp. The baby was a delight to look at, good and sweet like her mother.

I got a job in a electrical shop the day after my arrival, and tried to lead a normal life. I was not earning much, but at least I was finally free. As time progressed, I began making some nice friends in the area.

During this time I had a frightening experience. A close friend and I drove in my car after work daily to swim in the ocean near Providence. One day, while alone in deep waters, I felt a cramp in my leg and started to go down. After the second wave, I yelled for help. A woman tried to assist me, but I was too strong for her. Finally, a couple of men in passing boat were able to pull me aboard after rendering me unconscious with a blow to my face. I wound up in the hospital for one night while the doctor pumped out sea water from my stomach. I also made the pages of the local newspapers, with a picture of me and my heroic rescuers.

That was another sign from heaven, that I made the right decision waiting for over three years to emigrate to this wonderful country. I couldn't dream of such friendly life saving deed in Poland or Germany . So here was another close call ! But still it was not my time. Once more I had been saved by strangers. At that time I came to the conclusion that, for some strange reason, God wanted me to hang on for a while longer. Now that I am much older and a tiny bit wiser, I understand that He is keeping me alive so I can bear witness to all the atrocities that have befallen the Jewish people.

I also think that God wanted to prove how it is easy for Him to perform miracles. I hope and pray to be able to finish my task before the final call arrives. I strive to report the positive as





well the negative facts concerning our relations with the non-Jewish population while the whole world was at it lowest point.

In 1950 we received word that our brother Rubin, his wife Frania, and their daughter Sylvia, were able to emigrate from Poland to Israel. They were also experienced the loss of their luggage, some jewelry and cash at the hands of the Polish border police. Shortly after their arrival, Frania gave birth to a second daughter, whom they named Mary. Israel was a young nation, just a couple years old, engaged in constant struggle to defend itself from the hateful and powerful neighbors, was not able to supply to all the incoming refugees from around the world even the basic simple living conditions. After several years of living in a tent with his wife and two daughters, mostly being unemployed and relying on food packages from us, they were able to emigrate to Canada, where Rubin obtained a decent job in Montreal, helped by fluent knowledge of French language. After six years, being Canadian citizens they finally were able to join us in New York. Rubin found employment in his profession and all of them led a happy live. The two daughters attended fine schools, graduated from college with honors, worked, married fine young men and after awhile each of them were blessed with two beautiful children.

In the meantime, David and I had been working for others for two years. We decided to take a chance, move to New York and go out on our own. We had to work hard in New York, but it was a good feeling, knowing we were achieving a better standard of living for ourselves.

In July, 1953, David and Giza had another baby girl, just as delightful as the first one. They named her Rachel, in honor of our sister Henia, who also perished with most of our family at concentration camp, Majdanek, located in Lublin, Poland, at the age of nineteen.

In 1954, wanting so badly to reunite our families, Rubin and his wife and daughters emigrated from Israel to Canada as first step toward achieving that goal. Finally, in August, 1959, they arrived in New York and became citizens. Our cousins also lived near by, so we saw them quite often as well. What a relief and a joy it was, to have the remnants of our family reunited in the same city once more ! Now I had two brothers and their families here. But I was still single.



In April, 1963, I decided to take a month off and visit Europe and Israel. It was a beautiful month to travel and I enjoyed good weather everywhere I went .

While in Israel I met a young Jewish lady of Australian background, who was living with relatives and working there. We took a liking to each other, and decided to continue our friendship by mail . But we missed each other so much that, when I returned home, I asked her to come to New York.

In late July, 1963, she arrived in New York and after a short courtship, we were married with a crowd of relatives and good friends in attendance.

On March 3, 1966, we were blessed with a beautiful baby boy, whom we named Philip Isaac, in honor of our two deceased fathers.

I will never forget the moment, right after the delivery, when the doctor brought the baby out for me to see. Our son gave us great pleasure and pride, and he was admired and spoiled very much by all our relatives.

His mother loved him very dearly, and did the best she could to express her feelings toward her only child. I worked long hours during the week, but the weekends and holidays were usually spent trying to keep the family together.

Unfortunately, after a few years, my wife and I agreed to a divorce. Philip decided to stay with me, while his mother went back to Australia to take care of her elderly mother. They have always stayed in contact with each other, however, and continue to have a very close relationship.

After graduating from a private high school in the borough of Queens, Philip enrolled in New York University to pursue his favorite subject-journalism- despite knowing all the negatives of that profession. After four years of studying he graduated with a bachelors degree in journalism and politics. He also earned several honors for his outstanding achievements.

In the meantime, our family was getting smaller.

In November, 1978, Rubin's wife, Frania, died of lung cancer, after a long and painful period of suffering. Rubin was her exclusive caregiver for the duration of her sickness, and I never heard him complain about his hardship. He continued to hope and pray for a cure for his





beloved wife and life partner until the last minute. After her death he went into a deep depression for quite a while. A few year later, Rubin met and married Ida, a very nice lady. They seemed very well suited for each other, and very much in love. Unfortunately, the their relationship did not last long enough.

June 20, 1982, on Father's Day, Rubin suffered a massive heart attack and died instantly. Many years have passed since then, but is always on my mind and deep in my heart. Hopefully, he finally was able to rest in peace, after such turbulent and heroic life. My cousin Zyg passed away shortly after experiencing a severe heart attack, at the age of sixty-six.

They all died before their time, leaving us with a great void. I will never forget them, and they will be with me until my dying days. They suffered so much and, at the end, were not given enough time to enjoy their families.

After working very hard for many years, David and Giza decided to move to Florida in order to enjoy their retirement in a warmer climate. A short time latter, I also purchased a condominium in Florida, having a great desire to taste the sweet feeling of taking it easy and doing all the things I could not afford to do until now.

In 1987, I was fortunate enough to meet a young French - Canadian lady, while she was visiting her sister. Although it was difficult for her to leave her family behind in Canada, we were married in Florida after a three- year courtship. She really did adjust to her life here very smoothly, in a short period of time.

In 1988, my son Philip graduated from college. He was immediately hired as a journalist by the Associated Press ( AP ) and enjoyed working there very much for over six years. After receiving a very good offer from CNN news network he started there working as business news producer and writer. As of this writing he is still happily working there, but the company's name is now "AOL Times Warner ". He visits us in Florida several times a year and we also travel to New York quite often.

I've had a very difficult life, I 've suffered great human losses during the war, as well after, and now my greatest desire is to see my thoughts in print. All the Nazi atrocities have to be reported



again and again, so that, hopefully, nothing like this will ever be allowed to happen in the future. People in the United States were told very little about these events, for a long time. But that has all changed lately. Now the horrible truth is finally being told - in schools, churches, synagogues, in the movies, in newspapers, and in books.

The facts are now being spoken about aloud, instead of in whisper, in order to honor our holy victims. I have been interviewed for the Holocaust Museum in Miami, and my story is now recorded on tape, so that the future generations can listen to an eye- witness telling the real truth.. I am also participating in the life testimony of Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, founded and chaired by filmmaker Steven Spielberg. His foundation and his film Shindler's List have done much to acquaint the general public with the facts, so that future generations will never forget what so few lived to tell.

I know nothing can heal our wounds, and I continue to be upset by the way the search for the murderers was conducted, with very few apprehended and convicted. The time is getting short, the victims as well the brutal culprits are all old and dying. Soon it will have to be left to God to punish the guilty beasts.

My story bears witness to the atrocities which took place during the war. I also speak with pride of the many heroic Jewish underground fighters who fought the oppressors, despite the terrible odds. If the local population had made some kind of attempt to help their Jewish neighbors, a lot of lives might have been saved. Most did not help, however, and a great many innocent civilians paid with their lives.

The Talmud ( fundamental code of the Jewish Civil Law ) says ;

“He who saves one life, saves the world.”

My brother Rubin saved more than a dozen people, including me, and I consider him a hero!

Before I end my story, I would like to give credit to another person who is very dear to me. In 1948, my brother David began to date Giza, and that was when I met her. After their beautiful wedding, Giza became more than just a sister-in-law to me, serving in part to replace the





void left after the loss of my two sisters in the Holocaust. When I arrived in the United States, I stayed with David and Giza until I could find a place of my own. During that time she treated me like her own brother, she lost in the Holocaust.

After they moved to Florida, Giza continued to be very active, belonging to many social organizations, and arranging lunches and meetings in her home. Then tragedy struck once more. Giza became a different person, forgetful, easily agitated, and acting strangely. After consultation with her doctor, David was told that she is suffering from Alzheimer's Disease, and the lives of that wonderful couple were changed forever.

David has become his wife's caregiver, sacrificing his time and energy to her exclusive care. Giza, a woman once so fully independent, is now completely disabled. It is heartbreaking to watch her trying to talk and do things for herself -and mostly failing. I hope that we will be able to find some medical help and save these sufferers from this terrible disease which robs the person of his or her mind and dignity.

For many years I could not attend religious services, reasoning that this time God did not listen to our prayers and please for help. When I got older my lovely wife Christine finally was able to talk me into joining the shul and pray to God for well being of my family, small in numbers, but very much beloved by me. I still believe in people's humanity and hope and pray that something like this should never happen again any place in the world, and all nations should live in peace and prosperity.

This, my life story, is dedicated to my dear departed family, so brutally murdered by the Nazis, as well as to those who remain, my dear wife, Christiane, my son, Philip, my brother, David, my sisters-in-law, Giza and Ida, my nieces and nephews, who were all so instrumental in completing this job. I would also like to express my great love and undying devotion to all of them.

Submitted by: Joseph C. Rosenbaum

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